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ABSTRACT

A previous study used questionnaires to determine the pre- and post-course expectations of freshman college students enrolled in an introductory psychology class. The most frequently listed pre-course expectation was to get a good grade or pass the class. Post-course evaluations showed that students were more likely to feel that their expectations for the instructor, as opposed to themselves, had been fulfilled. This study was designed to extend the earlier study by including an evaluation of advanced students, with 199 students completing the pre-course evaluation and 168 completing the post-course evaluation. For male advanced students, the most important pre-course expectation was to get a good grade or pass the class; for females, it was to develop good study habits and stay awake. The most important post-course expectation for both sexes was to learn more about human behavior/emotions. The most frequent post-course expectation of the instructor by advanced male students was that he/she be pleasant and friendly with a sense of humor; for females, it was that the instructor enjoy teaching and be enthusiastic. Results highlighted the fact that freshmen share many expectations with more advanced students. (ABL)

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Student Expectations: Similarities And Differences Between Freshmen And More Advanced Students

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Running head: EXPECTATIONS

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Student Expectations: Similarities And Differences Between Freshmen And More Advanced Students

On the first day of each semester students and faculty meet in the classroom with one common goal--the acquisition of knowledge. At least this is the perception that most faculty members appear to take with them to the first class meeting. Unfortunately, we do not know if students share this view.

As introductory psychology is the foundation course, an appreciation of students' perceptions of it is important. Our students bring many misconceptions with them to this course. Such misconceptions come from books, the media, parents, and so on. Unfortunately, the extent of this problem is unclear. Some authors (e.g., Gutman, 1979; Lamal, 1979; Vaughan, 1977) have provided data suggesting that students have a large number of misconceptions. Others (e.g., Brown, 1983) contend that the number is relatively low.

Because they are part of the students' perceptions of psychology, these misconceptions influence the expectations students bring with them to each new course. Exactly what these perceptions are remains an elusive topic, but there appear to be two general types of expectations. One type concerns students' expectations of the course per se; the second concerns

expectations associated with the instructor.

The general research project was designed to provide some data in this area. To accomplish this objective, two questionnaires were developed.

The pre-course expectations questionnaire consisted of nine questions. The first seven items dealt with such topics as age, gender, number of semesters in college, major and so on. Question 8 asked the students to "Describe (in as much detail as yoou care to) 6 expectations/goals you have for yourself as a student in this course"; Question 9 asked them to "Describe (in as much detail as you care to) 6 expectations you have of your instructor."

The post-course expectations questionnaire was designed to determine how well the course dealt with students' expectations. It consisted of a series of questions having "yes" (this goal was accomplished), "no" (this goal was not accomplished), or "not one of my expectations" as response alternatives. The items were chosen to reflect the most frequent responses made to Questionnaire 1 at the beginning of the semester.

In a study reported by Becker, Grover, and Davis (1988) these questionnaires were employed to determine the pre- and post-course expectations of freshmen college students enrolled in introductory psychology.

The five most frequently listed pre-course and post-course expectations from this study are listed, as a function of gender, in Tables 1-4. It was interesting to note that a large majority of the students in this study were unable to list six pre-course expectations for themselves and six expectations for their instructor. The respective means were 4.23 and 3.76 for Personal and Instructor expectations, respectively. Post-course evaluations revealed that students were more likely to feel that their expectations for the instructor, as opposed to the expectations they held for themselves in the course, had been fulfilled. Remarkably, all students were able to report on the satisfaction of significantly more expectations at the end of the semester than they were able to list at the beginning of the semester. Specifically, it was felt that an average of 9.48 Personal and 13.58 Instructor expectations had been satisfied by the end of the course.

The present study was designed to extend this research program to include an evaluation of the expectations of more advanced students. Once such expectations have been ascertained, they will be compared with those of the freshmen that were previously tested.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

Questionnaire 1 was administered to students enrolled in classes in developmental psychology, psychology of adjustment, and applied psychology at Emporia State University. All testing was done during the spring semester of 1988. Introductory psychology is a prerequisite for each of these courses. Pre-course testing took place during the second class meeting of the semester. A total of 199 students (63 men and 136 women) completed Questionnaire 1. Questionnaire 2 was administered to the same set of subjects during the final class meeting of the semester. It was completed by 52 men and 116 women.

Results and Discussion

Questionnaire One - Pre-Course Expectations

Tabulation of the demographic data gathered on Questionnaire 1 indicated that the ages of the men ranged from 18 to 40 years, while the ages of the women ranged from 18 to 54 years. The majority of the subjects (65% men, 84% women) were in the 18 to 21 year-old category. The most frequently cited reasons for taking these courses were either "required for the major" or "interested in the subject."

The responses to Questions 8 and 9, which dealt

with the expectations/goals the students had for their own performance in the course and the instructor's performance, respectively, were subjected to both inferential and descriptive analyses. A 2x2 unweighted means, split-plot analysis of variance was performed to evaluate the influence of Gender and Type of Expectation (personal vs instructor) on the sheer number of expectations listed on Questionnaire 1. Although the results of this analysis were nonsignificant, it is noteworthy that the Gender effect did approach significance, $F(1, 197) = 3.536$, $p = .058$. Inspection of group means indicated that females listed a slightly greater number of expectations. As in the original study by Becker, Grover, and Davis (1988), the present subjects were unable to list six expectations either for themselves or for their instructor. The specific mean values were 4.50 (Personal expectations) and 4.65 (Instructor expectations). As the average number of Pre-Course Instructor expectations increased nearly one full unit, it would appear that the more advanced students in the present study had a clearer conception of what to expect from their college-level instructors than did the freshman students tested previously.

In order to meaningfully examine the nature of these expectations, separate categories were established

within the general headings of Personal and Course expectations. The natural groupings of responses guided the determination of these categories. The five most frequently listed pre-course Personal expectations for men and women appear in Table 5. The five most commonly listed pre-course Instructor expectations for men and women appear in Table 6. It is interesting to note that many of these expectations parallel those obtained in our initial study with freshmen (see Tables 1 and 2). Specifically, concern was expressed about: (a) the grade they hoped to achieve, (b) learning in general and learning about psychology in particular, and (c) study habits and staying awake in class. All three areas reflect realistic, if not commendable, expectations.

Questionnaire Two - Post-Course Expectations

Frequency data from the Post-Course Questionnaire was subjected to a 2x2x3 split-plot analysis of variance in which Gender served as the between-subjects factor. Type of Expectation (Personal vs Instructor) and Type of Response (Yes - expectation was met, No - expectation was not met, Not an expectation) served as the within-subjects factors. Failures to respond were not analyzed. This analysis yielded significance for the Type of Response, $F(2, 332) = 418.138$, $p < .001$; Gender x Type of Response, $F(2, 332) = 9.846$, $p < .001$; and

Type of Expectation, $F(2, 332) = 52.457$, $p < .001$, effects.

Newman-Keuls tests, used to probe the significant Gender x Type of Response interaction, revealed a number of interesting contrasts. The most relevant ones will be highlighted here. Females responded "yes" significantly ($p < .01$) more often than did males, regardless of the type of question (Personal vs Instructor). This would suggest that females were more likely than males to feel that their expectations of both themselves and their instructor had been met. However, males did not make significantly more "no" responses than females. Thus, both males and females were equally likely to feel that a similar number of expectations were <u>not</u> met. Finally, both males and females were significantly ($p < .01$) more likely to respond "yes" than they were to respond "no." As with our initial study, it is interesting to note that the mean number of "yes" responses made on the Post-Course Questionnaire far exceeded the mean number of expectations listed on the Pre-Course Questionnaire. Recall that means of 4.50 and 4.65 were reported for the Pre-Course Personal and Instructor expectations, respectively. The students reported that an average of 9.48 Personal and 12.20 Instructor expectations had been met by the end of the course. Clearly, the students'

goals and expectations are not formulated sufficiently well at the beginning of the semester to allow their written expression. However, by the end of the semester it would appear that many of these vague expectations have become much more crystalized.

Newman-Keuls tests performed on the Type of Expectation x Type of Response interaction also indicated that regardless of gender, students were significantly ($p < .01$) more likely to answer "yes" than to answer "no" or "not one of my expectations" in response to Instructor expectations. However, the number of "no" and "not one of my expectations" did not differ reliably. Thus, regardless of gender, students felt that their instructor had lived up to their expectations. Suggesting that they were more satisfied with their instructor's performance than with their own, the students were significantly ($p < .01$) more likely to answer "yes" to the Instructor than to answer "yes" to the Personal items. Responses of "not one of my expectations" were given significantly ($p < .01$) more often to Personal than Instructor items. This result complements the previous findings suggesting that Personal, as opposed to Instructor, expectations may have been remembered better.

Turning to the nature of the items from the

Post-Course Questionnaire, the five most frequently listed Personal expectations for males and females appear in Table 7, while the five most frequently listed Instructor expectations appear in Table 8.

While there is considerable overlap between the Post-Course Personal expectations of the Freshmen and the present sample (compare Tables 3 and 6), it is especially noteworthy that concern over grades appears high in the list for both males and females in the present study. Concern over grades did not rank in the top five post-course personal expectations for the freshmen. Possibly the students had some contact with the real world of grades and the need to have acceptable ones in order to remain in school, subsequent to their freshman year. On the other hand, the post-course expectations held for the instructor did not vary appreciably between the two studies.

Hopefully, a consideration of these data will provide instructors with a more accurate picture of what their students expect from themselves and their instructor. Such an understanding will enable the instructor to adapt his/her class to better meet the expectations of the students. The present data highlight the fact that first-semester freshmen share many expectations with more advanced students. On the other

hand, it is important to take note of the fact that grades appear to play an increasingly more important role in terms of expectations the longer one is in college.

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Table 1

Five most frequently listed pre-course Personal (course) expectations as a function of gender. Freshmen

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 964 responses)	
	1. Get a good grade/pass the class. (12.8%)*
	2. To learn more about psychology.(9.9%)
	3. To learn and understand. (9.2%)
	4. Develop good study habits, stay awake. (8.6%)
	5. Earn an A/B. (7.6%)
Female (n = 1884 responses)	
	1. Get a good grade/pass the class. (12.3%)
	2. To learn and understand. (9.2%)
	3. To learn more about psychology. (9.1%)
	4. Learn more about human behavior/emotions. (9%)
	5. Develop good study habits, stay awake. (8.8%)

*Number of responses in category divided by the total number of responses made by the sample.

Table 2

Five most frequently listed pre-course expectations of the Instructor as a function of gender. Freshmen

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 859 responses)	
	1. Make the material understandable. (12.9%)#
	2. Be patient, openminded, fair. (12.6%)
	3. Make class interesting, fun, exciting. (9.2%)
	4. Give extra help. (8.8%)
	5. Be able to talk at students' level. (6.5%)
Female (n = 1660 responses)	
	1. Make the material understandable. (17%)
	2. Be patient, openminded, fair. (14%)
	3. Make class interesting, fun, exciting. (11%)
	4. Give extra help. (9.6%)
	5. Be able to talk at students' level. (5.1%)

Number of responses in category divided by total number of responses made by the sample.

Table 3

Five most frequently listed post-course Personal (Course) expectations as a function of gender. Freshmen

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 75)	
	1. Learn more about human behavior/emotions.(82%)*
	2. Enjoy class/have fun. (81%)
	3. Develop good study habits/stay awake.(73.5%)
	4. Come to class on time/regularly.(72%)
	5. Learn how to deal with certain people.(71%)
Female (n = 179)	
	1. Come to class on time/regularly.(91%)
	2. Learn more about human behavior/emotions.(85%)
	3. Learn how to deal with certain people.(81.5%)
	4. Enjoy class/have fun.(80%)
	5. Get to know myself better.(79%)

* Number of students responding Yes to category divided by total number in sample.

Table 4

Five most frequently listed post-course expectations of the Instructor as a function of gender. Freshmen

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 75)	
	1. Be patient, openminded, fair.(81.5%)*
	2. Be pleasant, cheerful, friendly.(76%)
	3. Relate class to everyday, current events.(75%)
	4. Get along well with students.(74%)
	5. Know the material well.(72.5%)
Female (n = 179)	
	1. Be pleasant, cheerful, friendly.(87.5%)
	2. Know the material well.(86%)
	3. Get along well with students.(85%)
	4. Care about students.(84%)
	5. Allow students to express their opinions.(80%)

* Number of students responding Yes to category divided by total number in sample.

Table 5

Five most frequently listed pre-course Personal (course) expectations as a function of gender.* - ADVANCED STUDENTS

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 266 responses)	
	1. Get a good grade/pass the class. (10.5%)*
	2. To learn and understand. (9.4%)
	3. Earn an A/B. (8.6%)
	4. To learn more about psychology. (8.3%)
	5. Apply what I learn to everyday life. (7.9%)
Female (n = 622 responses)	
	1. Develop good study habits, stay awake. (13.8%)
	2. Learn specific course content. (10.6%)
	3. Get a good grade/pass the class. (8.5%)
	4. Come to class regularly/on time. (8.0%)
	5. Apply what I learn to everyday life. (7.9%)

*Number of responses in category divided by the total number of responses made by the sample.

Table 6

Five most frequently listed pre-course expectations of the Instructor as a function of gender.* - ADVANCED STUDENTS

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 280 responses)	
	1. Be patient, openminded, fair. (12.5%)
	2. Make class interesting, fun, exciting. (8.9%)
	3. Be able to talk at the students' level (7.9%)
	4. Make the material understandable. (7.5%)
	5. Know the material well (6.4%)
Female (n = 618 responses)	
	1. Be patient, openminded, fair. (14.4%)
	2. Make the material understandable. (11.3%)
	3. Make class interesting, fun, exciting. (9.5%)
	4. Be pleasant/friendly/sense of humor. (5.5%)
	5. Give extra help when needed. (5.5%)

*Number of responses in category divided by the total number of responses made by the sample.

Table 7

Five most frequently listed post-course Personal (course) expectations as a function of gender.* - ADVANCED STUDENTS

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 52)	
	1. Learn more about human behavior/emotions (80.8%)*
	2. Come to class on time/regularly. (78.8%)
	3. Enjoy class/have fun. (78.8%)
	4. Learn how to deal with certain people. (78.8%)
	5. Earn an A/B. (76.9%)
Female (n = 116)	
	1. Learn more about human behavior/emotions. (89.7%)
	2. Enjoy class/have fun. (87.1%)
	3. Learn how to deal with certain people. (87.1%)
	4. Earn an A/B. (85.3%)
	5. Come to class on time/regularly. (81.9%)

*Number of students responding Yes to category divided by total number in sample.

Table 8

Five most frequently listed post-course expectations of the Instructor as a function of gender.* - ADVANCED STUDENTS

Gender	Expectation
Male (n = 52)	
	1. Be pleasant/friendly/sense of humor. (71.2%)
	2. Know the material well. (69.2%)
	3. Get along well with students. (69.2%)
	4. Care about students. (65.4%)
	5. Relate class to everyday, current events. (65.4%)
	6. Allow students to express their opinions. (65.4%)
Female (n = 116)	
	1. Enjoys teaching/is enthusiastic. (80.2%)
	2. Be pleasant/friendly/sense of humor. (79.3%)
	3. Allow students to express their opinions. (79.3%)
	4. Get along well with students. (78.4%)
	5. Know the material well. (77.6%)

*Number of students responding Yes to category divided by total number in sample.